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# CIA official tells CBS trial colleagues covered up guilt about figures on Vietcong

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NEW YORK - An official of the Central Intelligence Agency testified yesterday that many of his colleagues "papered over their consciences" after the agency agreed in late 1967 to support an artificially low estimate of Vietcong troops.

"I felt there was a guilt trial between that estimate and the debacle in January 1968," said Richard Kovar, referring to the Vietcong's Tet offensive, which caught the American public by surprise 17 years ago today.

As a witness for CBS in the \$120 million libel suit brought by retired Gen. William C. Westmoreland, Kovar offered unqualified praise for Samuel Adams, the former CIA analyst who helped prepare the 1982 CBS documentary at the center of the courtroom battle.

Several of Westmoreland's witnesses characterized Adams as man who could not distinguish between his own misguided obsessions and fact.

But Kovar told the jury: "Where Sam went wrong is he didn't salute and shut up. He pushed his arguments, his outrage at the agency's acquiescence in the process beyond the level that a subordinate is supposed to.

"That frightened a lot of people. That made a lot of people mad."

**'Where Sam [Adams] went wrong is he didn't salute and shut up.'**

- Richard Kovar

Consequently, he explained, "many of my associates to this day don't regard Sam as a true blue civil servant."

Kovar, who joined the CIA in 1951, served as deputy chief on the Vietnamese Affairs Staff in 1967. Most recently, after writing President Ronald Reagan's daily intelligence brief for two years, Kovar began a classified assignment in "current intelligence" two weeks ago.

He testified that in the late 1970s he urged Adams to "find out the real story" behind why the final draft of the 1967 estimate prepared for President Lyndon B. Johnson showed less than 300,000 enemy troops, when the CIA had evidence of twice that number.

According to CBS's "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," Westmoreland suppressed enemy data from Johnson to show progress in the war. But Westmoreland, commander of the Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MACV) from 1964 to 1968, contends CBS twisted a well-known intelligence

debate into a MACV "conspiracy."

The lower enemy estimate came in part from a decision to no longer count self-defense troops, who planted punji sticks and laid booby traps. The 1967 estimate sent to Johnson stated that "current evidence does not enable us to estimate the present size of [this group] with any measure of confidence."

"That sentence is not true," Kovar declared in federal district court yesterday. "We had all kinds of evidence - and so did MACV - about these several hundred thousand armed people."